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ABSTRACT

Recent reports, such as "A Nation at Risk," have reinforced the fact that postsecondary-level vocational educators must not only be experts in their chosen fields but must also be professional presenters of the information of their fields of expertise. In the 1960s and early 1970s, persons preparing to teach in postsecondary-level vocational education programs could generally take up to 3 years to acquire 9 credit hours of education classes. Today, a typical requirement involves taking from 9 to 18 credit hours in education and attending a vocational seminar or conference. While this represents some improvement in the state of teacher preparation, it is at best a very weak, if not token, approach. Studies indicate that the problem is not so much one of potential teachers not wanting to become good teachers, but rather one of a lack of opportunities to obtain adequate preparation and professional development. The literature on the professional preparation of vocational education teachers includes numerous surveys dealing with teachers' perceived needs for pre- and inservice education, current certification and licensing requirements, and the results of various attempts at assessing incoming teachers' abilities before they entered vocational education. These studies must be utilized and expanded upon. (MN)

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An Overview of Research and Concerns Regarding
Post-Secondary Vocational Educators'
Professional Preparation

Ray Denton

August, 1985

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ABSTRACT This article reflects a combination of twenty years of experience working with vocational education in a variety of capacities and research information and studies conducted having direct relationship to the area of post-secondary vocational educators' professional preparation as teachers.

An Overview of Research and Concerns Regarding
Post-Secondary Vocational Educators' Professional Preparation

No one doubts the need for vocational-technical education in the United States of America in this world today. The concern today is the professionals themselves—the vocational educators, their preparation and training, not only as experts in their chosen fields, but also as professionally trained presentors of this information to the students. This has been a central issue this last decade not only with vocational educators but with all post-secondary educators.

The "Nation at Risk" gave cause for everyone to focus on the secondary school. Several things were accomplished by that even though initially it was scoffed at and viewed as an exaggerated, over-stated and unjustified attack on our secondary schools. The language was harsh and dramatically posed. The results were a mixed blessing. It accomplished good things such as bringing education to the forefront and revising the concern level. Students, educators, administrators, communities and patrons looked at great depth into their educational system and most received high marks.

The problem was that the "Nation at Risk" addressed just the secondary school and even more serious than that it stated directly that more emphasis should be given to math and science which in effect cut back on attention to the fine arts, vocational education, and other elective areas. This in itself may not be so bad if

other avenues of preparation for the vocational areas are made available to the students.

Another blow given vocational education was the changing of the format or formula for financing vocational education. No longer would support monies be given to educational institutions, but assistance would be given only for upgrading and new, innovative programs. This would not affect the great programs or even the good programs. They will survive, because they have been tried, tested, and proven to be worthy. If they maintain this and continue to grow and remain current, they will survive. The other programs will have to come of age. They must improve and become relevant and worthwhile or suffer the consequences of truly having outlived their usefulness and effectiveness.

The programs worthy of meriting success and educators that believe in programs enough to put the spark and breath of life into the programs will survive. If lack of funds is a problem, that can be overcome. If it is a new and different direction that needs to be pursued, that can be accomplished. A program that has become stagnant can once again carry the excitement of newness and innovation by plowing new frontiers and discovering new areas of accomplishment like an unbridled colt in a new pasture.

Great things could happen in the area of vocational education. It goes beyond legislation and mandation, grants and funding. It comes down to the teacher or teacher professionalism. That is a

big term and means an awfully lot. They must be knowledgeable about the subject matter, believe in what they are doing, and be dedicated to the job and the profession. The real key lies in preparation. Perhaps of greater importance than subject matter knowledge, they must know the "how to". They need to know how to:

- 1) relate to students and mankind; 2) remain current with their field of preparation and continue to do so; 3) prepare a well-organized, systematic program through sequential lessons and take the student from his present level to successive levels in a logical, sequential and time-effective manner; 4) assess the student's abilities and recognize his true capabilities; 5) create a learning environment conducive to maximizing the student's learning ability; 6) vary and match their teaching style to the student's learning style; and 7) be an advocate of vocational-technical education and always be a credit to the field and profession in all aspects of their lives.

This paper is targeted at the practitioners, including the post-secondary vocational instructors, the post-secondary institution administration, and professors and researchers in and of the field of post-secondary vocational-technical education. It is based upon twenty some years of studying and working in the field in various roles and capacities (as a student in a vocational-technical institution, as a tradesman, as an adult educator, as a secondary vocational teacher/coordinator, as a Director of Adult Education,

and as a graduate student in Adult & Occupational Education.)

It has long been a concern of many involved with education that post-secondary educators do not necessarily require formal education to teach. Public K-12 school teachers must hold valid teacher's credentials to teach. Then it is good only for their area of speciality, i.e., elementary, pre-school, junior high or senior high and then only in their area of speciality like math, science, English, industrial arts, etc. in secondary.

Part of my frustration prior to getting my bachelor's degree was that I could teach adults; I could teach teachers, but I could not teach K-12 students. After attending a vocational-technical school and having worked in the field for two years, I received a vocational teacher's certificate and taught adult education classes. I knew my subject matter, however, I did not know how or what to teach. I was only told to teach the basics. I gave it my best effort and thought I was doing an adequate job. I was teaching the basics of my field of preparation. The students responded well as they wanted to learn and since I made my livelihood as a technician in this field and a good living from a reputable firm, they had trust in me and my ability. We worked long and hard the students and I. We put in longer days and more of them than "prescribed" by the course guidelines. I felt things were not going well though as we were not accomplishing the desired goal and not meeting with success.

The supervisor was in my room and "supervised". When I asked what I was doing wrong, I was advised that things were going fine. Just continue; it would all fit into place. In my estimation, it didn't and I felt a lot of the students were frustrated. I doubt that many felt it was my own inadequacies, however. They felt it was because they were older, slower, couldn't learn, etc. That raised a concern that has never been resolved in my own mind and, as I will be discussing in this article, has not been resolved today some twenty years after my encounter with this frustrating and deplorable situation.

Since those days, I have gotten my bachelor's degree in education. I learned how to determine and assess student needs and abilities, and determine what to teach and how to teach. I did teach my vocational field of preparation and had a rewarding experience in which I felt my students and I both felt much more satisfied than with the participants of the earlier attempt 20 years ago. I later went into administration of the secondary school and have taken methodology courses whenever I possibly could. The earlier memories never did go away, and the experience still haunted me. I always wanted to become more active with vocational education so when I had an opportunity to leave the high school principalship and become Assistant Director and Dean of Instruction at a well-recognized vocational-technical school, I jumped at the opportunity.

I was somewhat disappointed to discover that we in post-secondary vocational education have not made dynamic or even marked improvement in the area of teacher preparation. We have improved, yes. We have by no means, however, kept pace with the other arts and sciences. We are still plugging away doing it basically the way we were taught; the same today as we did yesterday with no plans for changing or improving.

There is a saying that when the going gets tough the tough get going. Now is the time to see how tough vocational education is. Times are getting tough with the cutbacks in federal support for vocational education programs and elimination of maintenance support. Support is available only to aid in improving and starting innovative programs. Weak programs or programs that exist out of tradition and have little or no relevance will find their survival difficult unless they improve.

It has been my experience in twenty plus years of working with vocational education in various capacities (as a student in high school, vocational-technical school and vocational education in college; as a vocational teacher of adult education; a secondary teacher and Trades & Industrial Coordinator; administrator of a comprehensive high school; and Assistant Director of an area vocational-technical school) that programs generally are weak because of a weak teacher. Teachers do not necessarily want to be weak teachers—I'm sure everyone starts out wanting to be good and

respected in their chosen field. I am convinced the crutch of the problem lies not in the lack of desire, not in the lack of intelligence, not in the lack of ability but in the lack of proper training and preparation. It has long been a concern of mine that in vocational education we do not train the teachers properly in methodology. Michael N. Sugarman (1974, p. 57) points this out in his article by stating, "The recent trend and rapid development of the two-year colleges with a multitude of post-secondary occupational curricula, has created an acute shortage of properly trained instructors." He goes on to discuss the concern of teacher competence and requirements for vocational education teachers for the present and projects concerns for the future.

In the late sixties and early seventies, teachers in vocational education in many states were tradesmen either from trade school backgrounds or apprenticeship programs and had at least an equivalent of two year's field or work experience. The professional teacher training a person received consisted of nine hours or so of vocational classes, often one of which was the history and philosophy of vocational education, and they were allowed up to three years to acquire these hours. Some areas today require 9-18 hours preparation and attending a vocational seminar or vocational conference. There is nothing wrong with these requirements, but they at best are very weak and only a token approach to professionally preparing vocational education teachers.

Mary L. Pankowski (September/October, 1975, pp. 8-9) listed 12 competencies of adult education teachers which were considered essential in assisting adults in achieving instructional goals and objectives. Teacher preparation and methodology of teaching was again cited. I agree this is a concern with the teachers lacking proper training to accomplish instructional goals and objectives. The fact of the matter is that a lot of these educators do not really know what goals and objectives are. They are tradesmen and craftsmen and know what they need to get accomplished and what the end product should be, but they lack the ability to define and organize step-by-step procedures to accomplish this. This is not because it is outside their limits or abilities, but because they have not been trained to analyze the field in such terms and techniques.

Dan Caneles (December, 1974, p. 187) further addresses this problem and supports the need for better vocational education teacher preparation in his article. He lists the following five essential elements as necessary for competency-based teacher preparation: "1) specifics of intended learning outcomes; 2) communication to learners of criteria and means; 3) explicitly designed instruction; 4) assessment through performance; 5) an individualized learner pace." As one analyzes these elements, all five come in the areas of teaching methodologies and strategies of mastery teaching of which most regularly trained educators in the

non-vocational tract have been exposed to in course work and in practice teaching prior to going into the teaching profession as a bonafide certified teacher.

Kenneth Mattran (May, 1976, p. 306) further elaborates on the above problem when he discusses the pros and cons of the practice of certifying people to perform educational tasks and concludes that "credentialling is a necessity which adult educators should make the best of by ensuring that certification has substance enough to assure those whom they serve are of practioner's professional calibre."

As reported by Ingram and Field (July, 1979, p. 27-32), a survey/questionnaire administered to 139 educators to determine the professional educational teacher competencies needed by post-secondary agriculture technology teachers showed that "of the 100 competencies listed on the survey instrument, 99 were perceived by the surveyed group as being above 3.0 (instrument scale average) in importance to the job." The article's conclusions support the need not only for formal vocational teacher preparation and training but the continuous support system of a well-planned and organized in-service program to keep teachers current with new trends and advances in the teaching technologies.

Leon S. Tunkel and Raymond S. Klein in their final report on the "Vocational Competency Testing Project" (July 1, 1975 - October 31, 1976) for the Georgia State Department of Education, Atlanta

studied the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute's (NOCTI) test series (written and performance for skilled occupations) for reliability, validity (written and performance) as compared to national norms for determining an appropriate cutoff score for methodology. Also, Michael Lindsay (May/June, 1984, p. 2) states in his position paper what needs to be done to aid teacher educators in preparing "effective instructors of adults." Lindsay studied methodology and findings with regard to what constitutes the desirable knowledge, skill, and personality characteristics of adult educators. He builds a strong case for the need for more emphasis on methodology preparation for educators of adults.

This is further pointed out in a study done by Gene Winter and LaVern Fadale in post-secondary occupational education in New York. "They surveyed 55 two-year post-secondary schools and from reports of 1922 faculty members, 274 chairpersons, and 64 central office administration, they discovered one of the highest concerns expressed unilaterally was teaching methodology along with the concern of subject matter knowledge."

In a March, 1983 survey of Wisconsin vocational education instructors regarding the preparation and professional development needs they regarded essential for licensing or certification, the following five areas were listed as being the most critical to post-secondary vocational educators (p. 20): "1) analyzing and the

development of an appropriate curriculum; 2) an understanding of new instructional technology, specialized equipment and teaching methods; 3) an awareness of emerging field or discipline technology; 4) in-depth knowledge of the vocational discipline; and 5) understanding of vocational education's relationship with career development and general education."

In a study conducted from the membership of the Wisconsin Association of Home Economics Educators, Jean Dunphy with Arlene Solberg and Georgann Ames, determined the following from the 800 members of the vocational educators responding to the survey. Regarding the necessary preparation as a vocational teacher, the number one ranked concern was participating in programs that would update educators in the content areas of their discipline. The second highest ranked concern of the vocational educators was the updating of their instructional skills.

Several ways of assessing incoming teachers' abilities before entering the vocational instructional field have been tried. Primarily, they are concerned with the conceptual and cognitive knowledge, but a few are going as far as testing or assessing the performance and application knowledge levels of persons desiring to become vocational educators. An example of this is the South Carolina Trade Examinations for Trade and Industrial Education that has examinations for 29 different trade and industrial occupational areas utilized in the State of South Carolina. The

test is designed to test the technical knowledge and skills of persons seeking certification as a Trade & Industrial Education Teacher and must pass the trade teacher's examination in the field in which specialized certification is requested.

Rebecca Love (January 30, 1984, Appendix A) reports the following on the results of a teacher survey of in-service training needs as they perceived them and the percentile ranking:

1. obtaining equipment and instructional materials	77%
2. motivation of students to learn	68%
3. vocational education laws and regulations	61%
4. maintenance technological proficiency	59%
5. working with the handicapped student	57%
6. using communication resources	52%
7. selecting learning activities	49%
8. developing an appreciation for the occupation	48%
9. community relations	46%
10. effective communication techniques	45%
11. working with craft and advisory committees	45%
12. methods of teaching vocational subjects	45%
13. student counseling placement/followup	42%
14. adolescent learning theories	40%
15. individualized instruction	40%
16. program evaluation	38%
17. professional organizations	38%

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18. teacher certification	38%
19. adult learning theories	36%
20. working with student organizations	36%
21. using teaching aids effectively	36%

The study led to the conclusion that the instructor's perception of the contribution of experience to improvement in teaching competencies is greater than its actual contribution.

The recommendations from Love's report (p. 13) for field-based activities were: "1) Professional developmental activities for vocational instructors should be based on strategies providing structured exchange of information and professional interchange; and 2) Participation in professional activities by vocational instructors as a means of improving instructional competence should be encouraged by local vocational administrators."

Further, as a result of this study, the Mississippi State University will now grant undergraduate college credit to the vocational educators that successfully pass the National Occupational Competency Test for those instructors so desiring to pursue a bachelors degree in education.

Research indicates that throughout the years we have been looking at, discussing, studying, testing, writing about, and advocating more and better teacher preparation for post-secondary educators especially in the vocational areas. Strong cases and statements have been made to support the need for this, and most

of us that have been involved with vocational education both at the secondary provisional area and the post-secondary level, believe and support this premise.

The literature that is available is good and sheds some light on the need for and the training of educators to teach and train adults in post-secondary institutions. The bulk of the studies and articles appear to be approaches to fixing, shaping, or altering the problem or assumed problem facing post-secondary vocational-technical education. Although the area has been talked about and problems stated or hinted, the area lacks true exhaustive research and empirical data collection for evaluative purposes.

It is imperative that we, as educators and researchers, develop proof that post-secondary vocational education will be improved with better teacher education preparation and training. If we can substantiate this premise, then we can formulate a procedural plan to accomplish this task.

From looking at current research, it appears the field is wide open. With the trend and attention now focusing upon this deserving field, the time is ripe and the opportunity is there for concerned researchers to probe the field of vocational-technical education. The payoffs will be immeasurable for the good it will do the United States as a country and the people of the world as a new level of understanding and appreciation for the field is reached.

The possibilities are there, but the tasks are not easy. They will take time and work, but it is available and obtainable, and the country is ready for it. The only real obstacle to the success is us.

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